



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## ELK ELVES GIFT OVER \$39,000 TO SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS

For over twenty years, the Pierre Elks Lodge 1953 has coordinated a community-wide holiday gift giving program for veterans. This program ensures that veterans at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home and the VA Black Hills in Hot Springs have a holiday to remember.

The Lodge surveys the veterans and the facilities to determine their needs and works to ensure these needs are met.

The Lodge has 42 partners (businesses/churches/state offices) located throughout the Pierre and Ft. Pierre community that host gift boxes for people to drop off their donations. Donations include: clothing, books, puzzles, toiletries, wall hangings, DVDs, CDs, electrical appliances, cash, gift cards, birdseed, etc. The list is endless and so is the giving. Students from all of the elementary and middle schools created over a thousand Christmas cards and decorated large bags of bird seed. It truly is a great community program supporting our heroes.

This project is successful because of the partnerships and the citizens of these two communities and their endless support for our veterans.

This years gifts provided for the veterans valued over \$39,000. Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus!!!!!!!



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# VA ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO CAREGIVER PROGRAM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will temporarily suspend discharges and decreases in level of support from its [Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) because of continued concerns expressed by veterans, caregivers and advocates about inconsistent application of eligibility requirements by VA medical centers.

“It is essential that we get this right,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This affects one of our most vulnerable veteran populations and we need to make sure we have consistency on how we process and evaluate benefit applications across the VA.”

The suspension does not impact the current application process. The VA medical centers are continuing to accept and approve applications to the family caregivers program based on current eligibility criteria along with processing appeals and monitoring eligible veterans’ well-being at least every 90 days, unless otherwise clinically indicated.

Termination of benefits exempted from the suspension include those made at the request of the veteran or caregiver, by the local Caregiver Support Program for cause or noncompliance or due to death, permanent institutionalization or long-term hospitalization of a veteran or caregiver.

In addition to initiating an internal review, the VA will continue to solicit feedback from external stakeholders. The VA is reviewing policy changes as well as pursuing long-term legislative and regulatory changes.

The VA Caregiver Support Program has aided more than 38,000 family caregivers since 2011. Participating families receive an average monthly stipend ranging from \$660 to \$2,600, based on the level of assistance required by the veteran and the geographic location of the veteran and caregiver.

Participating caregivers also receive access to health care if the caregiver does not have insurance, assistance with travel related to care of the veterans, mental health care and additional service and support.

For more information about the VA caregiver program, visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov).



# **VA AWARDS COMMUNITY CARE NETWORK CONTRACTS TO INCREASE HEALTH CARE ACCESS**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded contracts Dec. 28 to manage provider networks for Regions 1, 2 and 3 of VA's new Community Care Network (CCN), the department's direct link with community providers that will ensure the VA provides the right care at the right time to veterans.

"These contract awards reflect our ongoing commitment to increasing veterans' access to care," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "As part of the VA's modernization efforts, we designed the new network based on feedback from veterans and other stakeholders, along with lessons learned from the Veterans Choice Program. We are confident this new network will greatly improve customer service for veterans and timeliness of payments to community providers."

The network will be the standard contract vehicle allowing the VA to purchase care for veterans from community health care providers using industry-standard approaches and guidelines in support of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 to administer services and manage the network to its full potential. The VA will provide care coordination under this new contract. TriWest Healthcare Alliance has expanded its network to support veteran and provider care coordination across the nation until CCN is fully implemented.

Contracts were awarded to the following firm:

- Region 1 – Optum Public Sector Solutions, Inc.
- Region 2 – Optum Public Sector Solutions, Inc.
- Region 3 – Optum Public Sector Solutions, Inc.

The contract award for Region 4 is expected by early April 2019. Contract award for Regions 5 and 6 are expected by end of calendar year 2019.

Region 1 includes VA medical centers in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and West Virginia.

Region 2 covers Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Region 3 will serve Veterans in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

# VA AND THE APTA FORM PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT VETERAN'S HEALTH

The U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it recently established a partnership with the [American Physical Therapy Association](#) (APTA) to promote and support veterans by providing new physical therapy resources.

The partnership coordinates strengths of both organizations to benefit all veterans and their families, physical therapists (PT) and physical therapist assistants by helping to raise awareness of physical therapy and create new employment and practice opportunities.

"Physical therapy is an important resource for improving veterans' health and well-being," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This new agreement allows both organizations to develop additional best practices in treatment of veterans in both the federal and private sector. We look forward to the positive outcomes of this partnership."



The agreement will use VA and APTA resources to promote nonpharmacological treatment options for pain, [VA's suicide prevention efforts](#), utilization of [VA's Adaptive Sports Grants Program](#) and physical therapists' participation in the [VA's National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events](#).

The VA employs over 3,500 physical therapists and PT assistants, and offers the largest Physical Therapy Residency Program in the nation.

APTA represents more than 100,000 physical therapists, PT assistants and students of physical therapy nationwide. Its mission is to advance the profession of physical therapy and to improve the health of society.



For more information visit:

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or <https://www.apta.org/>.



# VA PARTNERS WITH THE INDEPENDENCE FUND TO HELP PREVENT VETERAN SUICIDE

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its partnership with [The Independence Fund](#) to provide wellness and mental health education to veterans, caregivers and families.

The VA and The Independence Fund will collaborate on suicide prevention initiatives to connect veterans with care and support before they reach a crisis point.

“Every veteran suicide is a tragedy, and our goal is to prevent suicide among all veterans nationwide — even those who do not seek care within our health system,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The Independence Fund is an important ally to reach veterans on this top clinical priority for VA, as well caregivers and their families.”

The two organizations will work together on Operation Resiliency to encourage veterans to take part in suicide prevention initiatives. This includes a 2019 retreat that will bring together at-risk veterans who served in the same unit during deployments.

Founded in 2007, The Independence Fund empowers the nation's severely wounded, injured or ill veterans to overcome physical, mental and emotional wounds incurred in the line of duty. It has a goal of improving the lives of both veterans and their families through the organization's mobility, caregiver, adaptive sports, and advocacy programs, while also bridging the gap of unmet needs of veterans' caregivers. The Fund works to give veterans the best mobility device options available, as well as promote their mental and physical health.



Suicide is a national public health issue that affects communities everywhere. The VA is engaging communities nationwide to deliver care and support to veterans where they live, work and thrive. Partnerships such as this with The Independence Fund are an important part of the VA's [National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide](#).

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a veteran in crisis, can call the Veteran & Military Crisis Line for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#).

Reporters covering veteran mental health issues can visit [ReportingOnSuicide.org](#) for important guidance on how to communicate about suicide.

# USS SOUTH DAKOTA COMMISSIONING

The Navy's newest fast-attack submarine, USS South Dakota (SSN 790), will be commissioned at Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton, CT, Feb. 2. Designed to operate in both coastal and deep-ocean environments, it'll be the 17th Virginia-class submarine to join the fleet.

South Dakota will be the third U.S. Navy ship, but first submarine, to be commissioned bearing the name "South Dakota." The first USS South Dakota (ACR9/CA 9) was a Pennsylvania-class armored cruiser and launched in 1904. Assigned to the Armored Cruiser Squadron, Pacific Fleet, South Dakota cruised off the west coast of the United States through August 1908. She was then sent on a cruise to Samoa and later operated in Central and South American Waters. She returned home in 1912 and was placed in reserve at Puget Sound Navy Yard.

The second USS South Dakota (BB 57) was commissioned March 1942 and assigned to Task Force 16 centered on the aircraft carrier USS ENTERPRISE (CV 6). South Dakota conducted blockade operations against Japanese forces approaching Guadalcanal, where they engaged Japanese carrier forces in the Battle of Santa Cruz. She saw action in the Battle of Savo Island, Battle of Philippine Sea, Okinawa, Iwo Jima and other Japanese strongholds earning 13 battle stars.

South Dakota will have a broad range of capabilities, including anti-submarine warfare; antisurface ship warfare; strike warfare; special operation forces support; intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; irregular warfare; and mine warfare missions.

Additional public information about the commissioning, and events leading up to it, is available at the USS South Dakota Commissioning Committee site at <https://ssn790.org/>.

The ceremony will be streamed live at [www.navy.mil/southdakotacommissioning](http://www.navy.mil/southdakotacommissioning).



USS SOUTH DAKOTA  
SSN 790

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 8—Governor's State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 8—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)  
Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD  
Jan 18—Sioux Falls Military Appreciation Resource Fair—Central Church (Ralph Rogers Road) 10:00 am—9:00 pm (CT)  
Jan 20—VFW Baseball Annual Meeting—Madison VFW Post Home—10:00 am (CT)  
Jan 21—State Offices Closed—Martin Luther King Day  
Jan 22—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)  
Jan 28-29—VFW State Legislative Conference—Pierre  
Jan 31—Veterans Town Hall—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls (1519 W. 51st Street) 6:00 pm (CT)  
Feb 2—USS South Dakota Commissioning  
Feb 6—American Legion Legislative Reception—Post 8—Pierre—5:00 to 8:00 pm (CT)  
Feb 8-10—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish  
Feb 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)  
Feb 18—State Offices Closed—President's Day  
Feb 22—Drop In Legal Services—American Legion Post 17—Watertown  
Feb 23—Drop in Legal Services—DAV (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls  
Feb 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC  
Mar 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)  
May 17-19—DAV Convention—Hilton Garden Inn (5300 S. Grand Circle) —Sioux Falls  
July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



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